ISSUE Prosody plays a key role in disambiguating between alternative questions (AltQs) and disjunctive polar questions (PolQs). Typically, AltQs are associated with an accent on each disjunct and a final fall (↑↓) and PolQs with block intonation and a final rise (Bartels, 1999), as illustrated in (1) and (2).

(1) Did Ana see Boris↑ or Osip↓?
(2) Did Ana see [Boris or Osip]↑

The aim of this talk is to derive the disambiguating effects of prosody in (1) and (2) from independently motivated principles that apply across the grammar. To this end, I combine the following ingredients: (i) insights from the question-semantics literature (Biezma, 2009), (ii) recent advances on intonation and discourse (Westera, 2017) (iii) Maximize Informativity (Dayal, 1996), and (iv) a refinement of the wellformedness condition on discourse structure. The key idea is that syntax-semantics mapping and prosody-discourse mapping have to be coherent with each other, i.e. a Mother Question as shaped by the prosody of its Daughter Question has to be congruent with the syntax-semantics of that Daughter Question. In evaluating this, there are two steps: (i) Maximize Informativity applies both to Mother Questions and to the actually uttered Daughter Questions, including AltQs (Spector, 2010) and PolQs. (ii) There has to be a proper motherQ-daughterQ relation. The result is that prosody directly shapes and manages the mother-QUD, which in turn indirectly –via the wellformedness conditions on the MotherQuestion-Daughter-Question relation, in interaction with Dayal’s principle– disambiguates the LF and interpretation of the Daughter Question (cf. Büring (2003) on B accents directly signalling a QUD strategy and indirectly disambiguating scope). The first advantage of the current proposal is that it models the entirety of ↑↓ prosody, as opposed to prominent accounts in the literature. A second advantage is that the proposal builds on independently motivated principles, that outscope the domain of alternative questions.

References


